Michigan Department of Natural Resources
Wildlife Division

RUFFED GROUSE AND AMERICAN WOODCOCK COOPERATORS EARLY SEASON REPORT

Early season reports from ruffed grouse and American woodcock cooperators allow biologists to quickly assess hunter success and local field conditions across the state of Michigan at the beginning of grouse season. This report is a summary of their responses for September 15-18, 2007.

Cooperators returned 117 useable surveys. They hunted 570.2 hours in 47 counties during the survey period. Respondents hunted most in Zone 2, followed by Zone 1, and Zone 3. Hunters reported the highest flush rates for grouse and woodcock in Zones 1 and 2, respectively (Table 1). Individual counties having at least ten hours of hunting with the highest flush rates for grouse were Missaukee, Houghton, Ontonagon, Oscoda, and Roscommon. Although woodcock season was not open during the survey period, cooperators were asked to also count woodcock flushes. Individual counties having at least ten hours of hunting with the highest flush rates for woodcock were Gladwin, Houghton, Lake, and Crawford.

Over half (52%) of the respondents thought grouse populations were up or slightly up from last year in the areas they hunted with 33% reporting populations about the same as the previous year (Table 2). Many (49%) of the respondents thought woodcock populations were the same as last year (Table 2).

Ruffed grouse have approximately ten-year cycles in abundance over much of Canada, Alaska, and the Great Lakes states of Wisconsin, Minnesota, and Michigan (Rusch et al. 1999). Many theories have been proposed to explain these cycles including diseases, weather, forest fires, sunspots, starvation, crowding, predators, genetic changes, and chance (Rusch 1989). It appears that we may be approaching the midway point of the ten-year cycle (Figure 1). However, hunters should note that increased or decreased abundance of animals at a regional scale does not ensure the same trend locally. The best grouse and woodcock hunting opportunities will continue to be in areas of young early forest successional habitat.

Several hunters commented on very warm and dry conditions during the first few days of the hunting season. However, many hunters reported cooler weather on September 15. Many hunters reported that this was the best opener in many years.

Acknowledgments: We thank all of the hunter cooperators who provided their early season hunting data. Survey data entered by Theresa Riebow. Report compiled by Valerie Frawley and Al Stewart. Report reviewed by Cheryl Nelson-Fliearman and Jennifer Kleitch.

Literature Cited

Rusch, D.H. 1989. The grouse cycle. Pages 210-226 *in* S. Atwater and J. Schnell editors. Ruffed Grouse. Stackpole Books. Harrisburg, Pennsylvania, USA.

Rusch, D.H., J.R. Cary, and L.B. Keith. 1999. Pattern and process in ruffed grouse cycles. Midwest Fish and Wildlife Conference 61:238.

Table 1. Ruffed grouse and American woodcock flush rates by zone and year for September 15-18.

	2006			2007		
Zone	Hours	Grouse / hour	Woodcock / hour	Hours	Grouse / hour	Woodcock / hour
1	168.3	1.4	0.2	153.4	2.8	0.4
2	431.8	2.6	1.7	378.3	2.6	1.6
3	90.9	1.2	1.1	38.5	0.6	0.8
State	691.0	2.1	1.3	570.2	2.5	1.2

Table 2. Hunter opinions about ruffed grouse and American woodcock populations.

	Ruffed grouse		Woodcock	
Trend	2006	2007	2006	2007
Up	17%	22%	11%	10%
Slightly Up	33%	30%	16%	14%
Same	36%	33%	43%	49%
Slightly Down	7%	12%	12%	14%
Down	7%	3%	18%	13%

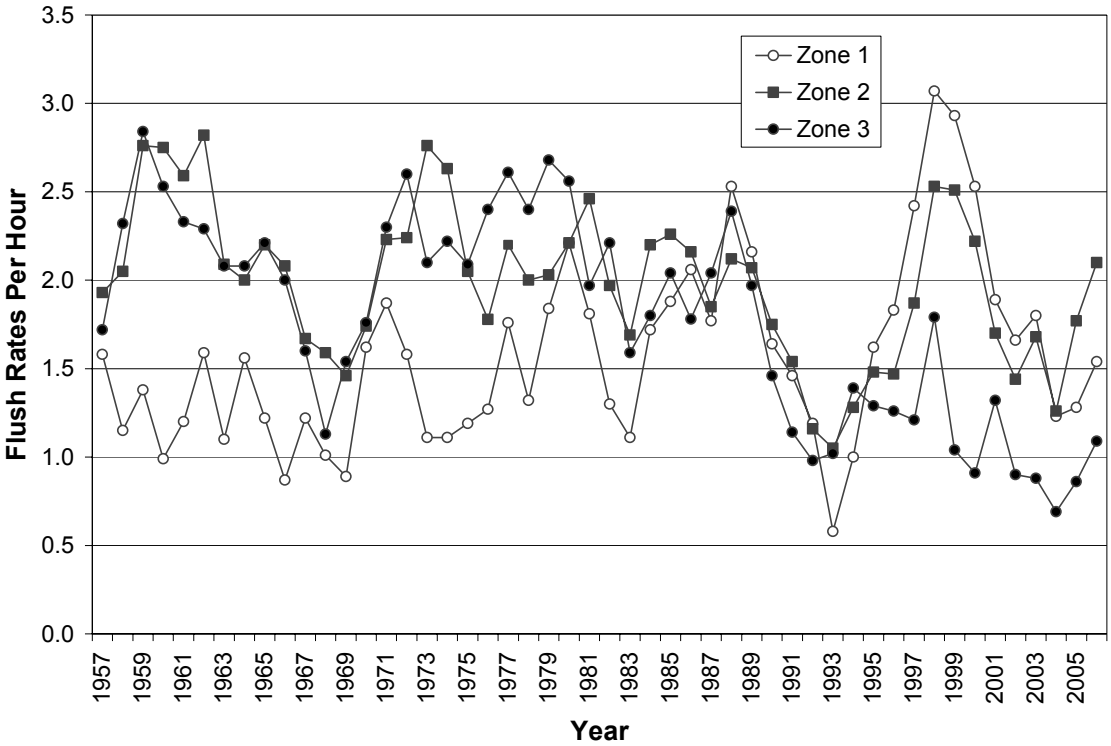

Figure 1. Ruffed grouse flush rates as reported by cooperating hunters, 1957-2006. This figure shows a summary of the data collected during the entire grouse hunting season. Data for 2007 will be added after the end of the season.